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Austria

Statement by

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Austrian Ministry for European and International Affairs

Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic
Reintegration
Geneva, 26 May 2009

Mister President,

I would like to make some additional remarks to the statement distributed by the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union on Monday, 25 May, which Austria fully endorses.

Mister President,

Let me commence with congratulating you and expressing my deep appreciation for all your efforts in steering our meeting and in ensuring the best possible results of our common work here during this week and beyond! I would also like to thank the Co-Chairs of the Victim Assistance Standing Committee, Belgium and Thailand, for their important contribution to enhance our efforts in regard to the care, rehabilitation and reintegration of landmine survivors.

During our deliberations today, we have witnessed a number of impressive presentations and statements showing how much States and organisations have done to ameliorate the life of those who fell victim to landmines and were lucky enough to survive. We welcome the progress already achieved in many countries and are grateful for the reports we received.

While acknowledging these improvements, Austria would like to highlight some challenges that still lie ahead. We have heard from practitioners that many survivors today remain marginalized and that many are still unaware of their rights. We learned that programmes are not always sustainable, that services are often limited to urban areas or that primary focus is given to the quantity of services provided, regardless of their quality. In light of these persistent shortcomings, we urge all relevant actors to double their efforts with a view to fulfilling the Mine Ban Treaty's promise to survivors for a better life.

Mister President, allow me to briefly share Austria's perspective with you.

My country attaches special importance to victim assistance and is traditionally committed to this topic, within the Mine Ban Treaty, as well as in other fora, such as the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Conventional Weapons Convention. As some of you may know, Austria served as co-chair for the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration in 2006-2007. Austria was also actively involved in the preparation of the "Plan of Action on Victim Assistance under Protocol V", adopted last November in the framework of the CCW, and played a leading role in the the formulation of new landmark victim assistance provisions contained in the Convention on Cluster Munitions which was adopted last May.

As a donor, Austria is fully committed to assistance to survivors. The Austrian Federal Act on Development Assistance legally requires us to take appropriate care of the needs of persons with disabilities in our development cooperation activities. This requirement to take care of the needs of persons with disabilities is also reflected in the Austrian Mine Action Strategy that foresees a percentage of up to 40 percent which is set aside for projects dealing with assistance to mine survivors.

Among other projects, Austria is currently financing a Mine Action Project in Sofala Province, Mozambique, administered by Handicap International. Among its many goals, this project aims at improving the situation of persons with disabilities, including mine victims, and is implemented in close partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. It is furthermore based on the National Action Plan for People with Disabilities, which was developed for all people with disabilities, without reference to the cause of the disability.

Together with Norway, Austria is also financing a Handicap International Study, entitled "Victim Assistance 10 Years On" with the purpose of providing input into the victim assistance discussion that will hopefully prove helpful in the process leading up to the Review Conference. The study undertakes an evaluation of victim assistance by looking at the improvement in the lives of survivors, their families and communities. It measures victim assistance achievements and challenges and presents good practices as well as lessons learned. Victim assistance is a wide field of activities, and the methodologies to best assist survivors are developed as we go along implementing our commitments. We believe that such a study will be of crucial importance for a better understanding of the "mechanics" of victim assistance to ensure the best possible performance.

Mister President,

One important future task is the coordination of victim assistance activities. A wide variety of actors works in the field of victim assistance, many UN-bodies, the ICRC, and numerous NGOs. We have heard from some of them today. Furthermore, several other fora and instruments have embarked on victim assistance activities. The Convention on Cluster Munitions, as well as the Plan of Action under Protocol V, helped to establish a new standard for victim assistance. In addition, the CRPD is of crucial importance to our work.

These efforts and the variety of activities carried out by different actors are a clear and unambiguous sign of the international community's willingness to place the plight of victims centre-stage in our deliberations. We wholeheartedly welcome this development and believe that our efforts should be guided by the highest existing standard! At the same time there is a need for best possible coordination among the relevant fora and actors to avoid duplications and to use the resources in the most rational and effective manner.

Mister President,

In conclusion, I would like to remind ourselves once again of our common goal: to achieve the full and effective participation and inclusion of mine survivors in the social, cultural, and economic life of their communities. In this regard, Austria is looking forward to actively engaging in the work of the Cartagena Summit of a Mine-Free World from 30 November to 4 December 2009.

Thank you.